

Letters from God
Hold on Until Jesus Comes
Revelation 2:18-29

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Introduction to Text: We are in the fourth week of a series we are calling, “Letters from God.” Revelation 2-3 contains 7 letters written to 7 historical churches of the first century world. More than just ancient letters, these letters are absolutely filled with practical themes for us to consider today. The message of the first letter was to “Keep Jesus First.” Jesus identified the critical need that the Church at Ephesus had left their first love. The message of the second letter is to “Be Faithful until Death.” The message in the third letter—a letter to Pergamum—was “Be Cautious of Compromise.”

The letter before us today is to the ancient city of Thyatira. Interestingly enough, this longest letter of the seven is written to the city that we know the least about. As one put it, “The longest letter is written to the least known, the least important, and the least remarkable of cities.” (Dennis Johnson, Triumph of the Lamb, also Colin Hemer, says something very similar.) The importance of this city is probably tied to its trade. The Book of Acts references that Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, was from Thyatira.

The letter follows the standard outline that we have seen in the others.

Text: ¹⁸ “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

“The Son of God, the One whose eyes are like a fiery flame, and whose feet are like fine bronze says: ¹⁹ I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. Your last works are greater than the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you: you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and deceives My slaves to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Look! I will throw her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her practices. ²³ I will kill her children with the plague. Then all the churches will know that I am the One who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known the deep things of Satan—as they say—I do not put any other burden on you. ²⁵ But hold on to what you have until I come. ²⁶ The victor and the one who keeps My works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations—

²⁷ and He will shepherd them with an iron scepter;
He will shatter them like pottery —

just as I have received [this] from My Father. ²⁸ I will also give him the morning star.

²⁹ “Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Introduction: The structure of all 7 letters in Revelation is similar. Each letter contains a (1) description of the **character** of Jesus, (2) a **commendation**, (3) a **condemnation** {if needed}, (4) a **call** to repent {if needed}, and (5) a **challenge** to persevere.

We examine today the fourth letter, which like the third letter deals with compromise. In fact, you could ask, what is the difference between the message to Pergamum and Thyatira? The problem is that compromise has escalated for the church in Thyatira. This progression gives us a clear principle:

Compromise will lead to Acceptance. So, **we must hold on** to our standards until Jesus comes again. (This seems to be the central thrust of this letter.) But how do we hold on in a world that is letting go?

Never Minimize Our Sin.

- Even though this church was known for its good deeds, they were also known for tolerating false teaching.

The specific good deeds are revealed in verse 19—love, faithfulness, service and endurance. In fact, unlike the message to the Church at Ephesus who had fallen off in their good works, this church had progressed. Yet, there is no escaping that they had tolerated false teaching.

- No amount of good deeds cancels out the bad deeds. This is the heart of the whole Gospel.

Never Rationalize Our Sin.

The Trade Guilds of the 1st Century

Trade guilds dominated commercial activity. Some of the people of Thyatira must have concluded that “it was just business.” However, we cannot remove any part of life out of our relationship with God.

“The deep things of Satan”

What some might call dabbling in sin, rationalizing sin, or a “little sin” is actually “the deep things of Satan.”

- No excuse is good enough to rationalize our sin.

When considering both minimizing our sin and rationalizing our sin, I think about how many of our major problems in society started out by minimizing and rationalizing something that seemed insignificant. Addictions are an example of this. No one starts off desiring to become an addict. Adultery is another example of this. Deciding to have an extra-marital affair is not usually the norm. People minimize and rationalize behavior.

The earthquakes of recent times have caused me to think about a book I read very early on in my ministry. O.S. Hawkins, current president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Annuity Board, or Guidestone as it is now called, wrote a book entitled, Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults. Hawkins suggested that the moral failures of our lives are much like earthquakes. Earthquakes have their origin in secret, hidden faults that are beyond the surface of the earth. These secret faults can go years undetected but are steadily building towards a catastrophic eruption. Likewise, moral failure is often the culmination of years of hidden, unchecked sin. Hawkins drew a second parallel between earthquakes and our sin. Just as most earthquakes have aftershocks, our sin has aftershocks. The

aftershocks of our sin are the consequences left behind by our sin. Whereas we would like to believe that our sin is an isolated event, Hawkins' analogy is a good reminder that our moral failures, like earthquakes, do not happen overnight and are not finished overnight.

I re-read this week the Biblical story of King David. King David, though powerful king and man after God's own heart, minimized and rationalized sin. He looked on Bathsheba while bathing. He inquired about her. Knowing that her husband was at war, he invited her to his palace. All of this could have been minimized and rationalized. Then, he sleeps with her and things escalate quickly. When he learns that she is pregnant, he quickly calls her husband in from the battle field. (Sin is escalating. He is rationalizing to cover things up. Sin leads us to do that. Compromise leads us to do that.) Instead of going home to be with his wife, Uriah, the woman's husband, sleeps outside the king's palace refusing to go home when his men are at war. David has to devise a new plan to deal with his situation. Instead of coming clean, he sends Uriah to the most dangerous place of the battle. Uriah is killed. The prophet Nathan called it murder. Think about that—minimizing sin and rationalizing sin took a man of God from looking lustfully upon a woman to a murderer.

Do I have your attention about this matter called compromise?

Always Realize that our Power is related to our Purity

There is the opportunity for repentance, but if no repentance, God is coming to bring judgment. Why? There is the need for purity.

- Discipline protects the church.

2 Analogies/2 Principles about Holding On!

1. I once hit a parked car on my bicycle because I wasn't paying attention. Here is the principle: **You cannot hold on to standards without paying attention to the standards.**

This is the call to know God's Word.

2. There is an epidemic of people today driving while texting. AAA says that the chance of having an accident while texting goes up 23 times. Here is the principle: **You cannot hold on to standards while holding on to another standard.**